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## Complying with School Accountability Requirements and the Impact on School Leaders

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*Abstract: Within an era of seemingly ever-increasing school accountability to both Federal and State jurisdictions in Australia, the impact of such requirements has received little attention in the literature. This research project was designed specifically to investigate the impact of compliance requirements on school leaders' workloads.*

*The literature reviewed finds that detracting from the key role of leading teaching and learning due to spending so much time on compliance requirements leads to disenchantment with the role of the principal and is a leading contributor to why so few aspirants are pursuing a career as a principal.*

*Eleven semi-structured interview questions were developed and analysis of the data revealed three broad themes: the use of resources required to meet compliance; the perceived value of the request for compliance; and, the impact of compliance on the independent nature of the school, educational leadership and personal cost.*

*The findings not only have implications for current school leaders, but also undergraduate and postgraduate course structures, particularly in educational leadership units, as the nature of the demands revealed in this study should be considered within course content.*

### Introduction

During a workshop conducted in April 2013, principals commented that they are being subjected to increasing demands to supply data to a range of stakeholders and to meet many regulatory requirements of both Federal and State governments. Anecdotal feedback to date suggest that the role of the principal is changing due to increased demands external to the school and is placing leaders more as administrative agents of governments and taking them away from the crucial roles of school leader and the driver of education leadership within the school. A recently completed comprehensive survey of Western Australian (WA) public school principals commissioned by the Secondary School Teachers Union of Western Australia (SSTUWA) concluded that "principals are overloaded with work, unsupported and under resourced to the point children's education is at risk" (West Australian, May 28<sup>th</sup> 2013). Prior to the commencement of the research, a briefing session was held and attended by principals and school board members. Two of the issues discussed was concern about the amount of time and stress external compliance requests were placing on schools, particularly principals.

The aim of this project was to investigate, within a sample of 12 WA schools, the impact of regulation compliance on the role of school principals. To ensure the schools,

which participated in this research remain anonymous their location and the education systems to which they belong will not be discussed.

The research question was: What is the impact on principal workload of completing external compliance requirements? Table 1 provides details of the interview questions, which were developed to collect the data.

Ethics approval was obtained from the Edith Cowan University Ethics' Committee prior to data collection. Before data collection commenced participants were provided with an information letter and a consent form.

The data were obtained utilising semi-structured interviews with principals and other school leaders selected through stratified random sampling determined by school student population size. Semi-structured interviews were used because: [they] enable a positive rapport to be developed between the interviewer and interviewee; the information gathered has high validity; complex questions and issues can be discussed and/or clarified; interviewer pre-judgement is resolved; and, the interview is easy to record (<http://www.sociology.org.uk/methfi.pdf>). Data gathered at the previously described briefing session were collated and informed lines of inquiry in the construction of the semi-structured interview questions.

The interviews, conducted between 18<sup>th</sup> April and 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2013, were scheduled for a maximum of 60 minutes and ranged between 38 and 57 minutes. Consent forms and information letters were provided for the interviewees. The interviews were designed to gain qualitative and rich information about the compliance and accountability process in each school, and, in doing so, to elicit feedback on: an estimate of the quantity of school resources utilised to address compliance; the perceived value of the request for compliance; the impact on the independent nature of the school; the impact on educational leadership; and the personal cost on school leaders in terms of stress, lifestyle and health. Where necessary, probing and clarifying questions were used to develop and expand on responses provided.

The interviews were recorded, with a commercial organisation being employed to transcribe the interviews. Anonymity of the interviewees was maintained at all times through the use of a coding system: for example, Principal One. The data were coded into emerging themes, with initial coding occurring during the interview process, which is consistent with the comment made by Burns (2000), who noted that the process of coding begins at the actual interviewing stage. Codification of qualitative data is required as it enables researchers to "... 'see what they have in the data'" (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p. 206).

## Participants

There were 20 participants from 12 schools interviewed. In all cases the Principal was interviewed and in some schools the Principal chose to invite other school leaders and/or administrators to participate. Such an invitation was at the discretion of the Principal. The voluntary participants were selected to be representative of the wide variety of non-government schools in WA. The twelve schools varied in most key elements and represented a wide cross section of non-government schools in WA: student population size (50-2750); pre-kindergarten to year 7, pre-kindergarten to year 12, and K-12; location (northern, western, eastern and southern suburbs of Perth, regional and remote WA); ethos; philosophy; mission; strategic planning; fee structure (if any); alliance with other like schools or a completely individual community school; single gender or co-educational; and, teaching principals and non-teaching principals.

The roles of the participants included: Principal/Headmaster (12); Head of Junior School, Dean of Curriculum and Director of Staffing (1 of each); Bursar/Financial

Administrator (3); and, Business Risk/Compliance Legal Manager (2). Fourteen of the participants had been in their current position for 10 years or less, while the remainder had between 11 and 20 years' experience. In terms of overall experience at their current level, ten had ten years' experience or less, eight between 11 and 20 years, and two more than 20 years. Eleven of the participants were male, with 14 being over the age of 51 years.

## Literature Review

An extensive search of literature sources revealed a relatively limited number of prior projects and papers that investigate the impact of compliance on school leaders' workload and consequent job satisfaction and lifestyle. The focus of this literature review is on the Australian context, but literature that explores accountability processes and their impact on American schools also informs the discussion.

All Australian schools operate within a 'regulatory framework'. As defined by Lock, Pilkington, Newton and Robson (2010) the term 'regulatory framework' refers to the collection of 'rules' that affects all aspects of the work of a school. The regulatory framework consists of all laws, regulations, policies, directives, guidelines, memoranda, plans and rules that specify organizational arrangements in education agencies and schools. The 'rules' come from varying sources, have varying levels of compulsion and flexibility and can change from time to time. Regulatory frameworks establish the basis for all accountability to which schools; leaders, teachers and support staff follow (Lock et al., 2010). The work of schools in meeting the requirements of these 'rules' constitutes the burden of compliance as discussed in this literature review. It is exacerbated by the school leaders' attempts to meet the demands of two 'masters'. These leaders are held accountable by the school community (parents) for student performance and improvement, and by the government (Federal and State) for expenditure, student performance and school performance. School leaders must comply with these issues that are measured by a wide range of accountability tools.

Atelier Learning Solutions (ALS) (2007), in acknowledging the increasing complexity facing leaders in education, contend that "... for educators there is the stress of the high expectations of government and the community placed on them at all levels" (p. 3). In exploring this emerging complexity in more detail ALS refer to the work of Leo (2007) who commented on the growing number of government initiatives to which school leaders have to respond and, in the wider policy area, "... a lack of cohesion and sense of direction ..." (ALS, 2007, p.3). ALS also cite the work of Whitaker (2003), Stevenson (2006) and Hargreaves and Fink (2003, 2005) in discussing the increased role of principals since the 1990s, including "... increased accountability requirements from employing authorities and government; ... and more time spent on management and paperwork" (2007, p. 4). Probably, a concluding comment on this matter is also provided by ALS (2007, p. 3) who, in considering concerns for educational leaders identified in the literature, note "tension between the demands of managing a whole range of community and government pressures, *compliance requirements* (my emphasis) and accountabilities ..." (p. 3).

In developed nations like Australia large numbers of people are now employed by various agencies to generate, monitor and disseminate the regulatory framework under which schools operate. Various global influences and the virtually instantaneous transfer of information across the world make it increasingly difficult to synchronise policy settings and guidelines within regulatory frameworks. It is inevitable that tensions will arise between the policy settings of different agencies (and, perhaps, even between different parts of single agencies). Such conflicts can produce dilemmas for school leaders – if policy requirements conflict, how do they decide what to do, what priorities to apply and/or what

procedures to employ? Changes in different elements of the regulatory framework have the potential to increase the importance and the burden of ensuring school leaders have up to date knowledge and avoiding the problems of leaders unknowingly breaching elements of the regulatory framework.

The way in which the regulatory framework is applied depends on the perspectives of the people who are either ‘regulators’ or leaders of schools. In a study of regulatory approaches of statewide charter-schools in the United States conducted by Manno, Finn Jr, and Vanourek (2000), different applications of rule systems were evident. Regulators displayed a preference for either ‘negotiated compliance’ or ‘enforced compliance’ of the policy framework. Similarly, school leaders displayed a preference for either complying with the framework or testing its limits. If the regulatory framework were to be characterized in a drawing, this discussion suggests that most policies will be surrounded by a ‘zone of ambiguity’ rather than by a simple line. Zones of ambiguity represent a dilemma. On the one hand they can be a major problem for school leaders and areas where their practice can be ‘caught out’. On the other hand, they can represent significant opportunities for leaders to adapt system level requirements more easily to the needs, circumstances and aspirations of their schools. Rather than a compliance model of accountability by regulation Manno et al. (2000) advocate accountability by transparency. Allow schools to make local level decisions about operational, financial, and program autonomy in exchange for holding them accountable for results. In addition rather than bureaucratic control from higher levels within the system, accountability is propelled mostly by public market places in which a charter-school’s clients and stakeholders reward its success, punish its failures and send signals about what must change.

In the Australian context, Lock et al. (2010) contest there will be school leaders who feel constrained by the regulatory framework and there will be leaders who are determined to test its limits in pursuit of what is likely to be better for their schools, staff and students. Regulatory frameworks seem to be increasing in the number of elements they contain and the number of areas where school leaders are supposed to be focusing action. The dilemma for policy makers is: What is more important – for the framework to have inclusions that encompass the increasing breadth of the agenda for education? Or, for the framework (whatever its content requirements) to inform and empower local leaders to develop local applications?

In Western Australia all schools (whether public or private institutions) are subject to provisions of the School Education Act, 1999. However, as detailed by Lock et al. (2010), in their operations schools are subject to many other pieces of legislation: for example:

- Employment legislation that becomes relevant because schools are workplaces for staff. From this legislation emerge all the awards and employment conditions regulations and other rules with which schools must comply in the employment of staff. More broadly based than just education, legislation relating to equal opportunity, disability discrimination and equal employment opportunity are significant in this category;
- Finance-based legislation that becomes relevant because schools receive and spend public monies. In Western Australia, the Financial Administration and Audit Act 1985 is a good example. This serves as an important basis for all regulations and instructions regarding schools’ use of public monies;
- Child protection legislation that becomes relevant especially where schools deal with students under the age of 18 years. This legislation, together with extensive case law, serves as the basis for various mandatory reporting and certification requirements for staff and volunteers, as well as being an important basis for how schools exercise their duty of care for students;

- Professional status related legislation, which becomes relevant because schools employ staff whose professional status is subject to regulation. Registration of teachers and school psychologists is one example where the legislation obliges employers and staff to ensure professional practice standards are maintained;
- Legislation that impacts on the day-to-day practices of schools regarding the recording, maintaining and disclosure of information. Freedom of Information legislation is a major example, as is legislation relating to copyright; and
- Legislation relating to land use and the standards of building construction. School buildings, facilities and grounds must be safe for all users and comply with a range of legislative requirements.

In the accountability sense, all school leaders are expected to achieve the best outcomes possible with the resources at their disposal through the operation of schools that comply with the various requirements of the regulatory framework. As has become evident through research conducted as part of this project, school leaders have to put in place risk management practices to safeguard against not meeting compliance requirements. In some cases this has meant employing specific staff members with this responsibility. Lock et al. (2010) conclude that school leaders are responsible for ensuring compliance with the regulatory framework and developing protocols to assess risks and ensure compliance are an essential tool for all school leaders and leadership teams. The fine detail of these tasks probably needs to be unique to each school, but there are areas of commonality where schools can learn from sharing their approaches. It should also be recognised that undertaking risk assessments and developing compliance protocols can be very valuable team building and professional development tasks for leaders and aspirant leaders.

While the challenges and needs of school leaders and aspiring leaders become more urgent as the scope, role and content of leadership becomes more demanding, the research suggests some ways forward for those prepared to take on the leadership role and for those charged with preparing them (Atelier Learning Solutions, 2007).

Three issues identified in the ALS (2007) to be addressed in particular are:

- The predicted leadership shortage in the future;
- The provision of quality professional learning to leaders; and
- Challenge associated with the change in the orientation of the leadership role towards management and accountability rather than leading teaching and learning.

In relation to the recruitment of new leaders, ALS (2007) identifies one of the issues as being how current leaders represent their work to aspiring leaders. Their research confirms that while most school leaders say they 'love' their work and enjoy 'making a difference' to the lives of young people despite the difficulty and relentlessness of the work they do, this attitude does not seem to be conveyed to aspiring leaders. It would seem, therefore, incumbent on experienced leaders to be prepared to mentor new and aspiring leaders and to convey the rewards of the leadership role, as well as the difficulties. This model of mentorship and development of new or aspiring principals has been adopted in many forms throughout Australia and the world. Principals in difficult schools particularly are in need of this support and other incentives to take on the role. New principals need support to survive the initial years and for experienced leaders the issue of retention needs to be addressed.

ALS (2007) advocate for structured quality professional learning for all leaders at all stages of their leadership careers. In conjunction with a review of recruitment practices, preparing and developing school leaders there is a need for alignment of standards and coordination of services through a central body, are cited in the literature as best practice strategies to improve leadership development. The provision of these programs will support

new leaders, offer mentoring, and challenges to experienced leaders and offer renewal to those school leaders contemplating early retirement.

ALS (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of the research surrounding the challenges associated with the change in the orientation of the leadership role towards management and accountability, rather than leading teaching and learning, and concluded two possible responses were emerging: first, examining the work of principals and re-thinking what is needed in the role by addressing, particularly, those responsibilities in the role of principals that improve student achievement; and second, a professional orientation which accepts responsibility and accountability for student achievement and defines and enforces standards in a full and open manner which is acceptable and accountable to the wider community, including government.

Survey data analysed by ALS (2007) demonstrated one of the recurring themes in responses by principals to the demands of their role is the concern that the emphasis on accountability and management strongly reduces their enjoyment of their work. For some principals, this pressure is enough to push them to early retirement, while for teachers it is discouraging them from taking on the principal role altogether.

The view that accountability for a schools' performance can be demonstrated by measuring against a set of standards is a concept that has provoked heated educational discussion since the 1970s. Wise (1978) first discussed the concept of 'Hyper – Rationalisation' and, in doing so, refuted the worth of minimum competency testing and the narrowing of educational goals. Accountability based upon students meeting minimum standards is, he argues, treating schools as factories where raw materials (uneducated students) were turned into products (educated students). It does not take into account the transmission of cultural knowledge, the reconstruction of society and development of citizenship, which must also be considered. Wise (1978) contends that hyper-rationalisation is the result of taking scientific rationality too far by selecting measurable (though not necessarily important) educational goals and induces a drift toward centralisation.

More recently, building upon Wise's theories, American educationalist Abe Feurestein (2001) revisits the concept of 'Hyper-Rationalisation' and its application in 21<sup>st</sup> Century schooling. He views the move to develop educational standards for American schools are premised on a set of hyper – rationalised assumptions. These include the idea that centralised authorities external to the school should develop educational policies and that educational efficiency should be the penultimate goal pursued through strict measures of accountability. This is a phenomenon evidenced in current Australian educational policy development.

Feurestein's (2001) working definition of 'hyper-rationalisation' as it applies now, is characterised by a privileging of economic efficiency over other possible educational goals and a focus on accountability, both of which lead to the development of measurable (although narrow) educational goals and a desire for centralised control. Furthermore, hyper-rationalisation leads to a limited and unrealistic view of teaching and learning. Interestingly these characteristics continue to dominate the educational landscape in Australia in 2013. Wise (1978) did not predict future educational policies when commenting on policies of the 1970s, but the creation of National and State educational standards are wholly consistent with the concept of 'hyper-rationalisation'.

To avoid the pitfalls associated with 'hyper-rationalisation' Feurestein (2001) asserts we must move beyond easily measured variables such as time on task or scores on standardised tests and recognise that what is truly important in education is the type of student-teacher interaction that helps students develop not only skills and knowledge but high expectations for themselves, their peers, and the society in which they live. "What we are interested in, after all, are kids with standards rather than standardised kids" (Feurestein, 2001, p. 117).

The burden of compliance for school leaders, as reflected in the literature, is in the context of accountability to external authorities for compliance with a range of standards and legislative requirements. The cumulative effect, as reasoned in the literature, is detraction from the leaders' roles in leading authentic teaching and learning, and a diminishing of the enjoyment of the role.

## Findings

Three themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data: time and resources; value of the request for compliance; and, impact on independent nature of the school, educational leadership, and personal cost. Table 1 reveals the interview questions categorised by theme. In this section italicised vignettes are used to illustrate the cases being discussed and principals are identified by their assigned code.

### Time and Resources

Unanimously the participants identified that the time and financial burden of meeting compliance was expensive for schools, with estimates of cost varying from \$7000 (for one of the small-sized schools) per annum to more than \$500,000. Costs all related to full time employees (FTE). Of the principals interviewed, ten participated actively in the compliance tasks. Estimates of time spent on such tasks ranged from two hours to two days per week. Two principals (4 and 6) were of the opinion that any time spent on compliance took them away from their core business of improving teaching and learning and, hence, took no part in the process other than to be briefed and sign the relevant documents. One principal (8), in commenting on the increasing compliance requirements, stated, "Just keeping up to date with everything and compliance probably has five times as much now for me, just to keep up to speed, than it was five years ago. That's in reporting, that's in knowing what's going on and so forth."

Larger schools had the capacity to delegate compliance tasks to a range of people within the school, while smaller schools had little opportunity to delegate, and in the smallest school the principal alone did everything. The two largest schools employed specialist personnel to manage compliance and legal matters.

The five most time consuming compliance requests identified were: preparation for re-registration reviews; policy development, implementation and review; attendance data maintenance; census (enrolment data); and performance management of staff. Preparation for a re-registration review was unanimously the most time consuming and stressful compliance issue regardless of the size or type of school. In small schools the workload for the principal was enormous. However, one principal (1), while acknowledging the amount of time required for the re-registration process, observed, " ... *I don't really see [the process] as much of a burden, they are standards that we should be aiming at.*" Another principal (8) noted, " ... I would like to say that I think the perception of the amount of compliance we have to deal with, and how that impacts on your feeling of stress and exhaustion and concern, is almost as bad as actually doing the task." This comment received support from another principal (5), "*When I think of the actual task we have to do, it actually doesn't take that much time I don't think. It's the feeling of these things weighing you down, that causes you think about them at home time, at - when you're in your bed at night, when you're in meetings and so forth. That takes a lot of your time. It's your headspace that's taken.*"



Eleven of the schools indicated that the principal received assistance with compliance issues from at least one source. All schools acknowledged the assistance of the system/sector to which they belonged in staying abreast of compliance issues and in preparing templates for policy development.

Theme	Interview questions
Time and Resources	<p>How many hours per week, on average, do you estimate you spend in responding to compliance requirements from external authorities?</p> <p>Identify the 5 most time-consuming compliance requirements (and, if possible, are you able to state how much time you spend on each of these compliance requests?).</p> <p>Do you have administrative support in responding to compliance requirements? If so, please indicate how many personnel and the approximate cost of employing such people.</p> <p>Are there any impacts of responding to compliance requirements on school resources: for example, ICT, teaching staff role responsibilities being adjusted, overall staffing?</p>
Value of the Request for Compliance	<p>Do you believe there are compliance requests, which are unnecessary and/or duplicated? If so, please provide some examples.</p> <p>Are you always clear about the reasons for compliance requests? Consider, for example, in terms of public policy.</p> <p>Are you able to identify compliance requirements to which responses are easy/difficult? Please specify and indicate the reason(s) for your selection(s).</p>
Impact on Independent Nature of the School, Educational Leadership, and Personal Cost	<p>In your opinion, are the compliance requirements a possible impact on the actual 'independent nature' of your school?</p> <p>Do compliance requirements impact detrimentally on your role as an educational leader? If so, please explain.</p> <p>Have you observed any impacts of the mandatory standardised testing program on student learning opportunities (curriculum design and implementation).</p> <p>What advice would you give to potential or recently appointed principals regarding compliance requirements?</p>

**Table 1. Interview questions categorised by theme**

All schools tried to protect their teaching staff from compliance requests, although, as one co-principal noted, “Load goes on administrative staff; load goes on leadership; load also goes on teachers.”

#### **Value of the Request for Compliance**

While all schools acknowledged and accepted the need for accountability, frustration was expressed about requests for census data from both State and Commonwealth

governments arriving within days of each other and in different formats are sources of frustration. In addition, one principal (9) commented about the way in which the data are requested and the amount of time given to accede to the request, *“There always seems to be some reason for the request. I can’t always imagine why someone would want that information, but the manner in which it is asked for, and sometimes the short timeframe in which they expect it to be delivered, is as much the frustration I think.”*

Commonly expressed was the view that if government departments communicated with each other much of the duplicated work undertaken by schools could be eliminated. Such duplication is a source of annoyance to principals, with one (Principal 3) observing, *“I don’t have a problem with being accountable ... but what I want to know is why on the same day I have to do a census for DES [Department of Education Services] and a census for DEEWR [Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations]?”*

Causing frustration is the need for all schools to develop their own customised policies. Some principals expressed concern at the relevance of some policies that were mandatory even though they had little relevance to their school: for example, Bushfire Policy.

Principals commented that the production of financial reports was not particularly onerous as software packages and audited books made access to the information quite straightforward. However, the provision of audited accounts as well as detailed financial data to the government is viewed as repetitious. In response to on-going data requests: for example, attendance and enrolment, the larger schools employ a school officer full time to maintain this data. The interview data also revealed that complying with information provision requests, and maintaining knowledge of the changing requirements of registration, particularly in relation to policies, requires constant attention.

Fragmentation of who is responsible for phases of schooling is a source of frustration among the school leaders who were interviewed: for example, Early Childhood is a Commonwealth Government responsibility, but Pre-Primary, which is now compulsory, is regulated by the State Government. After-school childcare is under a different overseeing authority again.

There is suspicion and disillusionment about the gathering of information for one purpose and then using it for another: for example, enrolment data regarding family background, and then using it to determine something quite unrelated such as funding. One principal’s (10) comment probably summarises neatly the thoughts of those interviewed, *“The problem is there’s an over-reliance on accountability through compliance measures and if I was to lose sight of the nature of what we do with the students, the things that we do with kids, and to think that we would have a good school simply because we were compliant to all of the regulations that might be out there, I think we’d be missing the point.”*

### **Impact on Independent Nature of the School, Educational Leadership, and Personal Cost**

All principals were of the opinion that compliance is an area of responsibility that is important to the effective running of the school and, therefore, warrants careful attention. However, and unanimously, the schools agreed that compliance eroded the independent nature of their school, with principal 7 observing *“... just having to do this, and putting the school principal and the administrators’ heads in that space, it cowers us a little. It makes us feel less free, because if we don’t do this then we can’t get that bit of funding.”* The interview data suggest that it is the amount of compliance, and the apparent duplication of requests, that is at the centre of the previous comment.

Schools that have a particular philosophy and ethos of education were most incensed about compulsory curriculum and reporting, while large schools, which have an excellent

history of success in many areas (for example, student achievement) over many years, were frustrated at having to meet requirements that proved viability.

Principals who are actively involved in meeting compliance requests agreed it took them away from the more important task of leading the teaching and learning program. One principal (7) opined that the biggest losers as a result of the burden of compliance are the students. He/she believed that effective leading of teaching and learning is suffering as compliance issues take leaders away from core business.

Several principals expressed the view that they would not encourage staff members who were aspirant to the position to apply, citing ridiculous work hours, lack of contact with students and staff, and the weight of responsibility as deterrents: *“You asked me how many hours I spend. Well, if I spend a single hour then I think I have failed in my role as a leader because my role is really to lead this school community, and fundamentally to improve teaching and learning.”* (Principal 6)

Loss of family time, stress and effect on health were common issues highlighted by principals. The source of greatest stress for the principal (3) comes not from what he/she called the daily routine of running the school, but from external agencies: *“If I need to respond or meet certain requirements or compliances, it is when I get very stressed. Because if I can’t meet those expectations... or miss a deadline or if you can’t meet the expected level, then that puts enormous pressure on me.”* One principal (8) indicated that when his/her contract expires he/she would not be renewing it due to the hours and stress of the job. He/she pointed out that he/she loves the school and the students, but the regulatory framework that has overtaken education is just too inhibiting: *“... when you make playgrounds so safe that nobody wants to play in them, when you won’t take excursions because the administration and meeting all the requirements means that it is just too difficult or you put your career at risk by doing so, you won’t take children out into the bush on camps because there are snakes, there’s a fire, there’s trees that drop branches ... You think what a sad state of affairs.”*

Another principal (1) is also considering resignation due to feeling so overwhelmed. At the commencement of the interview, this principal commented, *“I would like to say that I think the perception of the amount of compliance we have to deal with, and how that impacts on your feeling of stress and exhaustion and concern, is almost as bad as actually doing the task.”* A different principal (6) again was highly critical of the regulatory compliance process: *“Staff views the regulatory bodies as like the traffic cop waiting to catch you out. They are not viewed as empowering, advisory or [being] there to assist. They are there to pounce.”*

## **Summary, Implications and Conclusion**

The preceding discussion of the three themes, which emerged from an analysis of the interview data, indicate concern from principals and others in school leadership positions about the impact of compliance on themselves and student learning. Within the first theme (Time and Resources), time required to complete the compliance task, personal impact and fiscal costs of compliance received frequent comments, and the observation about negative impacts on student educational opportunity is of concern. The first two of these impacts have been noted in previous research by ALS (2007), in which reference was made to other research that indicated similar issues (Whitaker, 2003; Stevenson, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2005). Accountability for expenditure has also been alluded to in previous research (ALS, 2007; Lock et al., 2010), while Lock et al. (2010) also noted leadership accountability for student performance in relation to both parents and, Federal and State governments. The

actual dollar cost of accountability incurred by schools (for example, employing staff) has received little, if any, attention in previous literature, with the present study revealing that some schools spend considerable sums of money in this area.

Frustration emerged as the key finding in the second theme (Value of the Request for Compliance). Principals and other leaders cited multiple requests from different sources for the same data; developing that was perceived to be irrelevant policies; reporting to different agencies for the various phases of schooling; and, cynicism about data use. Responding to compliance requests that have been cited by ALS (2007), the specific instances cited by respondents were not apparent in previous research.

The interview data related to the third theme (Impact on Independent Nature of the School, Educational Leadership, and Personal Cost) revealed that while all participants acknowledged the importance of compliance, several impacts of a detrimental nature were observed. While the amount of time has been discussed previously, in this theme it was linked to principals stating they would not advise aspirant staff to apply for leadership positions, impact on personal health and limiting their role of leading teaching and learning. In terms of previous research the latter might be similar to the ALS (2007) research comment about pressure associated with community expectations, and has been previously discussed above, while the first two sub-themes were not reported in the cited literature.

The findings of the present research have implications for pre-service and graduate teacher education courses. In general terms, the importance of accountability, as demonstrated through compliance requirements, should be noted in pre-service teacher education courses. Graduate teachers, particularly those in non-metropolitan schools face the prospect of assuming senior leadership roles very early in their careers (Graham, Miller & Paterson, 2009), without necessarily being provided with sufficient professional learning opportunities. The impact of such demands may circumvent promising careers. In addition to the prospect of early leadership opportunities, graduate teachers may find themselves in charge of cost centres for school-based activities such as libraries or sports' equipment, without having acquired any knowledge and skills relating to effective financial management.

Postgraduate level courses in educational leadership probably best offer the opportunity to investigate challenges, such as those discussed in this paper, in depth. Discrete units can be developed to explore the various diverse aspects of school leadership: for example, accountability to authorities, leading members of the teaching staff, overseeing curriculum implementation and change, and working with school communities.

In conclusion, the findings of the present study can be linked to the work of Wise (1978) and Feurestein (2001) who, respectively, referred to hyper-rationalisation and centrally determined educational efficiency targets, the achievement of which is determined by adherence to accountability measures. Acknowledging and exploring these pressures in pre- and post-service education courses should assist in educating school leaders of the future by making them aware of the demands they will encounter and enable them to develop strategies to mitigate the personal impact of such pressures.

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